



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
SB 204, AAC Best Practices for Protecting Senior Citizens from
Interaction with Sexual Offenders
Committee on Aging, February 10, 2015**

Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, and members of the Aging Committee, my name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am the Director of Public Policy & Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the state's leading voice to end sexual violence and the coalition of our state's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs, which provide free and confidential sexual assault crisis counseling and victim advocacy to thousands of women, men and children, of all ages, each year.

Certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state, and community education and professional training presentations. CONNSACS also employs specialized post-conviction victim advocates who represent victims and their interests throughout the state as part of the Office of Adult Probation Sex Offender Supervision Units and Parole Special Management Units.

We would like to thank Senator Osten, Representative Riley, and Representative Ryan for introducing *SB 204, AAC Best Practices for Protecting Senior Citizens from Interaction with Sexual Offenders* and the Aging Committee for raising the bill for a public hearing.

According to the National Institute of Justice, sexual abuse is one of the most understudied aspects of elder mistreatment¹. CONNSACS was pleased to be invited to speak before the *Senior Safety Zone Task Force* late last year, and we support many of the recommendations made in the *Task Force's* final report. In particular, CONNSACS favors greater collaboration with our nine community-based sexual assault crisis programs to provide training and education to those working with seniors.

As Connecticut's population of residents age 65 and older continues to grow- projected to increase by 57% by 2040- it is imperative that those working with seniors have a basic understanding of:

- Trauma and common behaviors of victims of sexual abuse;

¹ Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/elder-abuse/pages/sexual-abuse.aspx>

- Ways to support victims of sexual violence and access services; and
- Tactics used by sex offenders to groom and silence their victims.

As was mentioned in the *Safety Zone Task Force* final report, too often in the case of the senior population, a victim's sexual abuse goes untreated or behaviors associated with the sexual abuse are dismissed as a consequence of dementia. When thinking about the sexual abuse of seniors, it is important to recognize that many of the seniors receiving care are survivors of past sexual violence, either as children or at some point during their life. So, while it is important to acknowledge that sexual abuse of seniors can take place in a care setting, those working with seniors should be trained to receive a disclosure and access services, to understand trauma, and to provide victim-centered care to adequately prepare them for working with survivors of sexual violence.

Finally, *SB 204* aims to protect senior citizens from sex offenders in order to prevent sexual violence. The overwhelming majority of people who choose to commit sexual violence have never been caught or convicted, and are not on the registry. While it is important to look at individuals who are on the registry and to consider their management, restrictions, and supervision related to seniors, it is vitally important to consider that a senior will more likely be abused by a caregiver - someone who is not on the registry. CONNSACS supports both further exploration of a victim centered tiered risk approach to the registry as well as policies and programs that increase the training and awareness of institutions and agencies staff and volunteers to recognize offending behavior, the ways that sex offenders groom and silence their victims, and to take all victims disclosures and reports seriously.

Thank you for addressing this important issue and for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.